

## Contrastive Rhetorical Analysis of Saudi ESL Writing

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### Abstract

Many Saudis studying English suffer because of their inability to write well in English. There are few studies that examine the impact of first language and culture on the ability of Saudis to write in a second language. This study revisits Kaplan's (1966) claims about Arab students' writing that are based on the theory of contrastive rhetoric. It begins with an overview of the development of contrastive rhetoric. It also examines the impact of genre and culture as it is used to analyze the work of Arabic ESL learners. The study then analyzes Saudi participants' (n=4) English language writing through the lens of contrastive rhetoric theory. The author uses ethnographical research methods to analyze samples of English writing and to interview his participants about their experiences as ESL learners. The paper findings indicate there are major grammatical and content problems in Saudi students' English writing. He concludes that thinking in Arabic while writing in English leads Saudi ESL writers to misuse word repetition, parallel construction, and to overuse specific grammatical structures. The paper concludes with suggestions about how to correct flaws in current ESL teaching techniques used with Arabic speaking students including tactics for addressing their lack of English reading and dictionary skills.

*Keywords:* English as a second language, contrastive rhetoric theory, ethnographic research, Arabic-speaking students

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